

April 1996

Here is the Good News of the United Church of Christ, especially edited for congregational publications, with topical news of the wider church, helpful hints to strengthen members' faith and pride in the denomination and personal testimonies to stir the spirit. Each story is short and complete and can stand alone, ready to drop into the weekly bulletin or the monthly newsletter. The code at the end of some entries refers interested readers to a more comprehensive story in *United Church News*.

CALLING ALL COOKIES – Home made cookies are almost as American as apple pie, and they travel better. That's the thinking behind the request of UCC military chaplain Mark Roeder for cookies for the peacekeeping troops in Bosnia. The mostly young soldiers need a reminder of sweetness of home and peace and communion. So, all you cookie bakers, get out your mixing bowls, whip up a batch and ship 'em off to Chaplain (Capt.) Mark Roeder, HHD 485th CSB, 16th CSG, Operation Joint Endeavor, APOAE 09789. Wouldn't it be neat if a chocolate chip cookie kept the peace?

And, if you're not a cookie baker, a soldier might appreciate a friendly word from home. For all services, address correspondence to Any Service Member, Operation Joint Endeavor, APOAS 09397; or for sailors and marines on ships, FPOAE 09398.

OH NO - Notice in a local church bulletin: "At the evening services tonight, the sermon topic is 'What is Hell?' Come early and listen to our choir practice."

WAVING THE FLAG – Many UCC churches give equal prominence to the Christian flag and the American flag. The Christian flag, with its cross, is recognized by many Christians throughout the world. Old Glory, among other things, reminds us we live in a country whose First Amendment to the Constitution says that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion nor interfering with the free exercise thereof.” Some, however, question the wisdom of placing symbols not related to the church so close to the cross. “While the altar and pulpit area (the chancel) have not been as central to some Protestant traditions in comparison to other Christian traditions,” maintains Pleasantville UCC, Chalfont, Pa., “it is still the place where the sacraments are celebrated and the Word of God is preached.” So, the church council ruled that the American flag should not be a part of the chancel area competing with the cross, the central symbol of the Christian faith. “Our patriotism for country should always be second to our faith in Christ,” the church insists. Where do your flags stand?

-Our thanks to *Communitas*, publication of Pennsylvania Southeast Conference

TAKE A BOW, CHARLES – Charles Lee of the UCC’s Commission for Racial Justice has been tapped, twice, for national honors for his work on environmental and housing racism. The Institute of Medicine, a unit of the prestigious National Academy of Sciences, has invited him to serve on its Committee on Environmental Justice. He also shared the Gustavus Meyers Center Award from B’nai B’rith as one of three authors of the book, *Residential Apartheid*. Lee’s work is based on a 1991 study of housing discrimination, funded by a Neighbors in Need grant. Lee is best known for his 1987 landmark study showing that toxic waste dumps are concentrated in minority communities.

SMELLING PC – Scents keeping you out of a pew? Don't laugh. If you wear perfume or cologne in church, you may smell good to some but could be the cause of great discomfort for others. The National Academy of Sciences says 15 percent of the population suffers from Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), which can keep sufferers from sharing in such communal activities as movies, plays, concerts and church. One such sufferer is Nancy Hill, who wrote in the newsletter of Danville (Cal.) Congregational UCC that such scents were keeping her from worship. The Rev. Elizabeth Chandler Felts, pastor, then asked the congregation to consider refraining from wearing perfumes and cologne. The response has been gratifying, she reports, and Nancy Hill can breathe a littler easier.

UCC MINISTER COMBATS CHURCH FIRE BOMBINGS – A gutsy UCC minister is leading the fight for a more aggressive Federal investigation of the recent upsurge of fire bombings of black churches in the South. “Our country is in denial about racism,” charges the Rev. Robert L. Polk, National Council of Churches Deputy General Secretary for National Ministries, “but in fact, the climate has really spawned these outrageous events.”

Twenty-five southern churches have been fire bombed over the past three years, more than half of those since December 1995. “The white hate groups are growing faster than at any time in our history,” Polk said at a news conference in Knoxville while calling for law enforcement protection of pastors receiving death threats and recognition of the racist nature of the attacks.

MAY I QUOTE YOU? – “One could argue with Native American peoples that we must learn to compromise with the ‘real world,’ that to pursue our own cultural affection is to swim upstream against the current of the modern socio-economic world system . . . How easily we internalize the assumption that Western Euro-American philosophical, theological, economic, social, spiritual and political systems are necessarily definitive of any and all conceivable ‘real’ worlds.”

—George Tinker, Native American theologian, from *New Conversations*, a publication of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries

Keeping You Posted is edited by William C. Winslow and produced monthly by the UCC Office of Communication, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115-1100.

Send story ideas to: William C. Winslow, UCC Office of Communication, 475 Riverside Dr., 16th fl., New York, NY 10115.

A PLAY FOR ALL JAPANESE – Japanese are sensitive about the role of their country in World War II, so it was with some trepidation that UCC missionary in Kyoto, Cadilda Luzares, agreed to produce a play on the Japanese invasion of the Philippines. “It was the most difficult and challenging thing I ever did in Japan,” she says of her five-month struggle to bring to the stage *In My Father’s House*, by the Filipino playwright Elsa Martinez-Coscoluella. Cadilda was worried about opening old wounds, “but I never doubted this was a God-anointed project.”

The audience response was “rewarding,” she says. “People lived the pain and the anguish of the family through whose lives the brutal physical and psychological horrors of the war were unmasked. My students told of the anger they felt at the men (literally) who made war and victimized innocent people, especially the women. They had not heard of ‘comfort women’ and, until they watched the play, they did not know what a terrible evil military prostitution was. It is unbelievable, but most of my students did not know that Japan invaded and occupied the Philippines. Their history classes never taught them this.”

COLD HANDS AND WARM MITTENS – Who knitted those thousands of mittens and hats that every Christmas, since 1949, graced the pine tree in front of Emmanuel Congregational UCC, Watertown, N.Y.? She was known only as the mitten lady. And then, on the third Sunday of Advent 1995, when it was time to dedicate the tree, her identity was revealed. Perhaps, because she was 86 years old and confined to a wheelchair, the handful of friends who knew her decided it was time to honor Helen Bunce. The congregation gave her a five-minute standing ovation.

The lifelong church member had heard a story about mittens being handed out to children in Europe by relief workers in the years following World War II. They ran out of mittens before they could wrap up the cold hands of a little boy at the end of the line.

Listening to that story, Helen was reminded that the need is unending, so she started her 50-year odyssey of the knitting needles. Every item she finished came with a hand written note, “God loves you and so do I.”

Helen also believed that as long as she was knitting, the Lord wouldn’t take her, so she never finished one project before starting the next. On Feb. 24, 1996, Helen Bunce died. Her daughter found a completed hat and the needles bound together with a rubber band, stuck in the skein of yarn, empty.

FOR 50 YEARS A HELPING HAND – For half a century, UCC congregations have opened doors and hearts to refugees. In 1995, 124 churches participated through sponsorship or financial aid in the resettlement of 2,160 refugees from 25 countries. The largest number came from Cuba, followed by Vietnam, Bosnia and Somalia. The work is coordinated by the refugee resettlement office of the United Church Board for World Ministries with One Great Hour of Sharing funds.